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# Economic and Social Council

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**Commission for Social Development**
**Fiftieth session**
1-10 February 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication**

## Statement submitted by Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2012/1.

11-60059 (E) 121211

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## Statement

The Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society applauds that the priority theme for the fiftieth session of the Commission for Social Development is poverty eradication. It also applauds the Commission as it moves ahead on its review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups, including families, and on its review of the report of the Secretary-General on the preparations for observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family at all levels (A/66/62-E/2011/4).

We are convinced that optimum solutions for poverty eradication will become possible only by recognizing the fundamental role played by the family in all such efforts. In 2004, the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, Secretary-General Kofi Annan declared that families have major, albeit often untapped potential to contribute to national development and to the achievement of major objectives of every society and of the United Nations, including the eradication of poverty and the creation of just, stable and secure societies (see A/59/176). Also in 2004, he declared that the family is a vital partner in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the many other objectives set by the international community during the last decade (see A/59/PV.67).

The family's importance to development was also explained in 2004 by members of the African Union in its plan of action on the family in Africa. In that document, it was asserted that, in Africa, due to its multiple roles and functions, the centrality, uniqueness and indispensability of the family in society is unquestionable. For generations, the family has been a source of strength for guidance and support, thus providing members with a wide circle of relatives on whom they can fall back. In times of crisis, unemployment, sickness, poverty, old age and bereavement, most people rely on the family as the main source of material, social and emotional support and social security. Therefore, the African family network is the prime mechanism for coping with social, economic and political adversity in the continent

For the African Union, the family remains the touchstone of all successful development. Recognition that the family is the basic and most fundamental unit of society, a dynamic unit engaged in an intertwined process of individual and group development, justifies the need to place the African family at the core of society which needs to be strengthened as part of Africa's development process. The family continues to play a crucial role in Africa's development, and development efforts that are family-centred are essential to sustainable socio-economic development. It is imperative that the African family be well positioned to play a crucial role in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

Nor is the family's pivotal role in development restricted to Africa. Maria Sophia Aguirre, Associate Professor from the Department of Business and Economics of the Catholic University of America, has asked whether the family is relevant for economic development. In her answer, she says that data from across countries and sciences seem to clearly suggest that the family should be the point of reference if sustainable development is to be achieved. This is not because the family is a problem to economic development — it is the solution. It is within the family where human, moral and social capital, all essential conditions for an economy to develop, are either encouraged and nurtured or hampered. Children

develop best within a family that is functional, that is, with a mother and a father in a stable marriage. This means that the family is a necessary good for economic development and should therefore be promoted and protected if sustainable development is to be achieved. At the same time, data across sciences also show that the breakdown of the family damages the economy and the society since human, moral and social capital is reduced and social costs increased.

In short, the important goals of poverty eradication and family strengthening must not be approached in isolation. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. In the words of eminent historian Will Durant, "the family is the ultimate foundation of every civilization known to history".

We believe that the greatest success in poverty eradication will come as development efforts focus on strengthening the family as the fundamental unit of society.

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication**

## Statement submitted by Al-Hakim Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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## Statement

As the world's population reaches 7 billion, 11 years after efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals first got under way, poverty, ignorance and disease continue to constitute a serious global challenge, while millions of people, and many societies, still suffer from the burden of poverty and its attendant ills, including marginalization, exclusion and discrimination.

Despite all the commitments, promises and action programmes at the local, national and international levels aimed at the eradication of poverty, there remains a yawning gap between theoretical solutions and the social reality, which is dominated by poverty, exclusion and injustice and in many societies, especially in developing countries, where it has become an indicator of the existence of social imbalance.

Because of natural disasters in some countries, including floods, droughts and earthquakes, many people have been deprived of their livelihoods, placed at risk of deadly diseases and compelled to leave their homes and migrate elsewhere, with the result that large numbers of these people are now living below the poverty line, and all the efforts that have gone to promote sustainable social development may prove to have been wasted. The main cause of poverty, however, is still human behaviour: it is the phenomena of exploitation, corruption and greed that have touched off the current wave of economic crises, armed conflicts and policies of marginalization and social isolation. All of these may be considered primary causes of the spread of poverty worldwide, in addition to the unjustifiable and sophisticated practices routinely utilized by many Governments, which are one reason why plans and projects aimed at eliminating poverty are ineffective, and also why services do not reach disadvantaged social groups in many societies.

It is an acknowledged fact that poverty is both a cause and a result of one of the main violations of human rights and forms of discrimination, namely the right to adequate food, which is one of the most important human rights. Moreover, it is generally agreed that inadequate income is not the only manifestation of poverty: other indicators include lack of opportunity and participation, limited access to health care, education, knowledge and means of obtaining information. All these are interrelated aspects of a single process resulting in the denial of people's rights, and in a life of poverty.

It follows from the above that oppression and injustice in the distribution and allocation of resources and the delivery of social services are among the leading causes of poverty, which in turn is a serious threat to health, prosperity, human dignity and human rights, forming as it does a barrier that is difficult to surmount; a barrier that tends to prevent poor people from participating fully in the development of their communities, in that, all too frequently, they are ignored and their voices are unheard.

The entire world has seen how Arab youth from disadvantaged social groups in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and other countries have risen in revolt to destroy dictatorships that had become riddled with corruption and had contributed to the isolation, marginalization and impoverishment of their societies, and how the demand for justice, an end to oppression and the elimination of corruption have been the driving force behind the revolutions of the Arab Spring.

We believe that the absence of justice in the distribution of wealth and the unjustifiable squandering of resources will remain an obstacle to all poverty

eradication plans and strategies. Moreover, statistics show that there are frightening numbers of poor people in the world, even as billions in resources continue to be wasted on armaments, the trade in narcotics and in similar areas.

We also believe that it is essential to ensure that people living in a state of poverty participate fundamentally and effectively in poverty eradication programmes and policies, inasmuch as they are the main beneficiaries of such activities, and, as such, must play a fundamental role in the design, monitoring and assessment of them.

We should like to reiterate that it is crucial for poverty eradication programmes to begin with the individual, through acculturation, education and investment in people to enable them to release their creative talents and allow them to innovate, develop and flower.

On the occasion of the fiftieth session of the Commission for Social Development, we should like to repeat our argument that it is essential to study the principles and legal provisions introduced by the monotheistic religions for the purpose of preventing exploitation and ending poverty and to conduct research into the feasibility of putting those principles and provisions to good use in designing strategies for combating poverty around the world. The divine Islamic religion, for example, gave the world legal provisions that serve to promote the eradication of poverty, the achievement of economic and social development and the realization of social solidarity by means of the *zakat*, or alms-tax, and the *khums*, or the one-fifth tax, both of which are forms of transfer of wealth from the wealthy to the poor. Islamic law also prohibits interest in order to prevent material exploitation, and there are other provisions that aim at strengthening solidarity among people.

With reference to Iraq in particular, we still have many groups that are afflicted by the issues of poverty and unemployment, despite the Government's efforts, because of the prevalence of administrative corruption and the lack of effective mechanisms to ensure that the laws are applied and that opportunities for Government employment are fairly distributed.

It is essential to activate the role of the Iraqi civil society institutions that were established to monitor the eradication of poverty because, since they can deliver a great deal in that area, they are key partners. As regards the Al-Hakim Foundation specifically, ever since its establishment in 2003, it has implemented numerous anti-poverty programmes as well as programmes aimed at helping marginalized social groups, such as the "orphan sponsorship" programme, which has brought benefits to 100,000 orphans, and numerous other programmes designed to help young people, including in beginning to build their married lives, by providing them with material and economic support. The Foundation also supervises educational institutions, which have provided primary, secondary and post-secondary educational opportunities for nearly 9,000 boys and girls.

In conclusion, we should like to reiterate that the Al-Hakim Foundation supports the "Social Protection Floor" initiative, which is a joint effort of the United Nations in coordination with the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization, with support from United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, development banks and other development partners. We believe that this initiative will help to further progress towards achievement of the first Millennium Development Goal.

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## Statement submitted by Environment Action Association, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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## Statement

# Roles of non-governmental organizations in poverty eradication: approaches for water scarcity problems

### Introduction

Water scarcity is increasing and 30 countries, mainly in Africa and the Middle East, are facing water deficits. The United Nations has underscored that, at the current rate of consumption, two out of three people will be living in water-stressed situations by 2025. Globally, the problem is becoming severe as populations increase, and the consumption of water for industry, agriculture and households also increases. Water shortage problems entail water-borne diseases and hinder economic and agricultural development. Overall, local, national and regional water-related problems have an effect on the rest of the world by deepening world poverty.

In this regard, special attention to adopt an interdisciplinary approach at the local, national, regional and international levels is necessary to eradicate the world poverty incurred by water shortage problems. This statement will focus on grass-roots participation by highlighting the approaches used by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in attempting to address the ongoing poverty incurred by water scarcity problems in developing countries.

### Issues and problems

Water is essential to human life and is needed for drinking, cooking, cleaning, bathing, washing clothes and irrigating crops. As population growth, urbanization, the industrial use of water and the use of agricultural chemicals increase, water resources are becoming scarce. According to the *Human Development Report 2006*, some 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water and 2.6 billion people lack basic sanitation. Furthermore, limited access to water is closely related to poverty. Almost two in three people lacking access to clean water survive on less than $2 a day, with one in three living on less than $1 a day. More than 660 million people without sanitation live on less than $2 a day, and more than 385 million on less than $1 a day. Janet Henshall Momsen points out in *Gender and Development* (Routledge Perspectives on Development) that as millions of people spend several hours a day collecting water, less time is available for other household chores such as childcare, cleaning and cooking. In addition, according to the United Nations Environment Programme, every year over 2 million people, mainly children, die from diarrhoea due to contaminated water and lack of sanitation, and 5 million deaths are caused by water-borne diseases.

### Approaches/challenges

In order to eradicate the root causes of poverty, partnership between Governments, NGOs and civil society based on human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability is crucial.

*Well project of Environment Action Association*

The Environment Action Association (EAA) visits many African and South-East Asian countries to conduct a well project to improve sanitation by, collaboratively with local governments, installing wells in those countries after prioritizing the

villages with severe problems. In July 2011, EAA installed a total of four wells in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, two for Poosankam village, one for Ponsai village and another for Napo village. The first place visited was Poosankam, where some of the local people are being forced out of their homes by expansion of the airport. Some of them have no access to safe drinking water while living in tents. Many local people spend thousands of hours collecting and carrying water. EAA installed wells in the Lao People's Democratic Republic during the rainy season, when the water supply is relatively good. However, the water supply decreases during the dry season, when many places, rivers and springs may dry up and the search for water becomes even more difficult and contamination more likely. Additionally, as Janet Henshall Momsen also points out in *Gender and Development*, irrigation schemes where water stands in ponds may increase the prevalence of mosquito-borne diseases, such as malaria, yellow fever and dengue fever.

Recommendations for efforts by NGOs to solve water scarcity problems can be suggested in the following six cross-cutting areas.

*Approach 1. NGOs as representative of civil society*

The National Water Policy of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2002, put emphasis on change from a Government-driven approach to a demand-driven approach, whereby communities are involved in the planning and management of water issues, as well as in cost recovery; in this regard, NGOs emerge as representatives or key actors of the private sector, according to Mashuhuri Mwinyihamisi in *The Role of NGOs in Integrated Water Resources Management: Resolving Water Conflict*, 2009.

*Approach 2. NGOs as facilitators*

NGOs facilitate the process of community participation, such as in the planning and construction of dams, wells and irrigation schemes (Mashuhuri, 2009).

NGOs facilitate the empowerment of the local community and social partners, by supporting the voiceless to speak for themselves (ibid.).

*Approach 3. NGOs as trainers*

NGOs have the role of trainers as they assist in the transfer of technical skills, knowledge and practices to the local people to install and protect wells.

*Approach 4. NGOs as advocators*

NGOs, as neutral non-partisan actors, strengthen citizens' capacity as decision makers and build more accountable and equitable Government legislation to increase community participation (VeneKlasen and Miller, *World Neighbours*, 2002).

*Approach 5. NGOs as watchdogs*

NGOs have a substantial role to play in identifying, assessing and monitoring Government policy and pointing out the shortcomings of the implementation process or of the policy itself.

*Approach 6. NGOs as educators*

NGOs promote local community awareness by incorporating innovation, knowledge and education into water management.

NGOs provide community-centred training programmes, promoting local capacities in order to manage and cope with water scarcity problems.

NGOs additionally provide easily understandable information on water-borne diseases for school curricula in formal and informal education, particularly for children living in poverty.

*Challenges for NGOs with regard to water scarcity*

- Funding is the crucial challenge in addressing water shortage in developing countries.
- Cooperation from water resource stakeholders and Government institutions.
- Most trainers dispatched by NGOs are lacking in expertise and experience to fulfil all the tasks they encounter.

**Conclusion**

Water shortage adversely affects future advances in poverty alleviation. In order to eradicate world poverty incurred by the water scarcity problems, special approaches must be taken in implementing policy and developing technology suitable for adoption by people living in water shortage areas (Mashuhuri, 2009).

A greater role for NGOs as representatives of civil society is needed for building various approaches in collaboration with Government institutions and making sure that water users also have rights and obligations with regard to policy related to the water sector (ibid.).

Furthermore, as pointed out in the Chair's summary on the priority theme, poverty eradication, at the forty-ninth session of the Commission for Social Development, Governments and NGOs as representatives of civil society should strive to create a multilateral system to increase international commitment to poverty eradication by taking public and solidarity-based action and implementing policies that eliminate discrimination and social barriers among people living in poverty.

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## Statement submitted by American Cancer Society, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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## Statement

## Summary

Cancer and other non-communicable diseases, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and chronic respiratory disease, are increasingly acknowledged as a major health and economic development issue, and one of the most significant emerging challenges to poverty eradication. Death and disability from such diseases significantly hinder economic development and are a significant threat to the global economy.

The magnitude of the threat of non-communicable diseases has been recently acknowledged in the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (General Assembly resolution 66/2, annex), in which the Heads of State and Government noted "with grave concern the vicious cycle whereby non-communicable diseases and their risk factors worsen poverty, while poverty contributes to rising rates of non-communicable diseases, posing a threat to public health and economic and social development". Non-communicable diseases represent a major and growing socio-economic burden on countries of the developing world, placing undue strain on communities and health systems and contributing to poverty.

It is imperative that international development and global health communities take action now to avert the preventable loss of lives and mitigate the expanding social toll and major financial burden of the disease.

**We call for**:

- The Commission for Social Development, States Members of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations to incorporate and embrace measures to prevent and control non-communicable diseases in recommendations to eradicate poverty
- Governments to implement the commitments made in the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases and to:
  - Promote national plans to fight non-communicable diseases by 2013
  - Increase and prioritize budgetary allocations for addressing non-communicable diseases
  - Develop prevention and control targets and indicators for non-communicable diseases by 2012
  - Explore the provision of adequate, predictable and sustained resources, through domestic, bilateral, regional and multilateral channels, including traditional and voluntary innovative financing mechanisms
- Governments to invest in health care that addresses the burden of non-communicable diseases, encompassing the complete continuum of care ranging from health promotion and disease prevention to the provision of primary health care, acute care treatment, rehabilitation, community care for chronic health problems and palliative care

- The accelerated implementation of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; tobacco taxation, as well as reducing consumption, can be an important source of revenue for Governments in their fight against non-communicable diseases
- Governments to recognize the unique social, economic and health needs of ageing populations and implement the recommendations of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002 regarding development and health
- The inclusion of non-communicable diseases within future international development goals, including future Millennium Development Goals.

**Cancer and the burden of non-communicable diseases**

According to WHO, non-communicable diseases claim more than 36 million lives each year and account for about 63 per cent of all deaths worldwide. Cancer contributes more to the global burden of disease, and to its social and economic costs, than other health concerns currently prioritized by the global health community (for example, HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis). Furthermore, according to the Global Task Force on Expanded Access to Cancer Care and Control in Developing Countries, cancer and non-communicable diseases are not diseases of affluent nations, in fact they most dramatically affect less developed nations:

- Of the deaths attributable to non-communicable diseases worldwide, 80 per cent are in low and middle-income countries
- Significantly, death and disability from cancer and non-communicable diseases are not restricted to the elderly, but are major causes of death and disability among adults between the ages of 15 and 59. Annually 8.1 million premature deaths from non-communicable diseases occur in low and middle-income countries
- In all regions of the world except Africa, mortality rates are higher for non-communicable diseases than for communicable diseases among men and women between 15 and 59 years of age
- More than 50 per cent of cancer cases and over 70 per cent of all global cancer deaths occur in low and middle-income countries, where cancer claims over 5.3 million lives each year
- According to an article published in *The Lancet* in 2010, the burden of cancer in terms of death and disability is overwhelmingly felt in the developing world — 80 per cent of the disability-adjusted life-years lost to cancer are in low and middle-income countries
- In low-income nations the disease burden created by cancer in adults is higher than other major public health concerns such as malaria, tropical-cluster diseases, nutritional deficiencies and diabetes
- According to WHO, in middle-income nations the disease burden attributed to cancer in adults is higher than that attributed to other major public health concerns, including HIV/AIDS, respiratory diseases, diarrhoeal diseases, tuberculosis, maternal conditions and diabetes

- The inequitable burden of non-communicable diseases on low and middle-income countries will only be exacerbated in the future: the projected expansion of the burden caused by non-communicable diseases will disproportionately affect poor and disadvantaged populations, thereby contributing to widening health gaps between and within countries. Deaths from non-communicable diseases are projected to increase by 17 per cent globally, and by 27 per cent in the African region, in the next 10 years.

**Cancer, non-communicable diseases and poverty**

Death and disability from cancer and other non-communicable diseases significantly hinder economic development; they represent a major cause of poverty and a major threat to the global economy. The global cancer burden is both a product of and contributor to the overall cycle between poor health and poverty, constituting a major barrier to sustainable economic development.

Given the pronounced disparities between and within nations in access to proven preventative and care options, the social and economic impact and costs disproportionately affect the poorest people in the poorest countries. The cancer burden imposes a substantial social and financial toll on families and communities, which is felt most acutely by the global poor. Inequities in cancer care and outcomes both between and within nations need to be addressed as a human rights imperative as well as an essential component of initiatives to combat poverty and promote sustainable development.

Policies and resources aimed at the development and implementation of evidence-based, resource-appropriate cancer control strategies can reduce the significant social and economic impacts of the disease and play a crucial role in promoting the development of more efficient and sustainable health systems, and can also provide essential support for efforts to address poverty and foster sustainable economic development.

- At the local level, cancer can have a devastating economic impact on families — diminishing household income, impacting un-monetized labour, and/or placing a serious financial burden owing to care and indirect costs — with long-lasting effects on the financial status of families, effects that may ripple through social networks and communities. For many people all over the world, the financial and structural barriers of poverty are insurmountable, preventing them from seeking services or care at an early stage. The costs of cancer can include direct payments and resources used for treatment, care and rehabilitation directly related to the illness and indirect costs resulting from loss of economic output due to days off work and premature death. There are other hidden costs, such as health insurance premiums and non-medical expenses, including transportation, child or elder care, housekeeping assistance, wigs, colostomy supplies and prostheses

- At the aggregate societal level, avoidable cancer-related morbidity and mortality exacts a considerable economic toll through its impact on economic productivity and through the inefficient allocation of scarce health-care resources. According to a study on the "Global economic cost of cancer" by the American Cancer Society and LIVESTRONG, cancer is the disease with the largest global financial impact. The financial impact of death and disability caused by cancer in 2008, not including direct treatment costs, was

$895 billion, the equivalent of 1.5 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP). Lung, colorectal and breast cancer account for the largest economic costs, while cancers of the mouth and throat, cervix and breast have the greatest economic impact in low-income countries

- According to recent reports issued by the World Economic Forum, given the projected growth of the burden imposed by non-communicable diseases, if intervention efforts remain static and rates of such diseases continue to increase as populations grow and age, cumulative economic losses in low and middle-income countries over the period from 2011 to 2025 are estimated to surpass $7 trillion (an average of nearly $500 billion per year), which is equivalent to approximately 4 per cent of the current annual output of those countries.

The financial impact of cancer and non-communicable diseases goes beyond financial costs — it actually undermines economic stability. The World Economic Forum recently highlighted chronic diseases as one of the three greatest risks to the global economy, along with fiscal crises and asset price collapse, based on a combination of likelihood and severity. In sum, as asserted in a recent edition of *The Lancet*, "the world faces a huge and largely unperceived cost of inaction around cancer in developing regions, which merits an immediate and large-scale global response".

**Policy and resources**

Despite the epidemiological and economic significance of the burdens imposed by cancer and other non-communicable diseases in the developing world, and the existence of effective strategies to reduce their incidence, including resultant morbidity and mortality, there are major inequalities between and within nations in access to cancer control resources. At the heart of these serious inequalities is a lack of global political and financial commitment to cancer control.

- Spending on non-communicable diseases, despite the fact that they are responsible for 63 per cent of the world's deaths, is less than 3 per cent of the overall global amount spent on development assistance for health-related problems

- Although more than 50 per cent of cancer cases, and over 70 per cent of cancer deaths and 80 per cent of the disability-adjusted life-years lost to cancer occur in low and middle-income countries, only an estimated 5 per cent of global resources for cancer control are spent there

- Countries in Africa, for example, account for 0.2 per cent of global medical costs for cancer; a little over 1 per cent of global spending on health; 6.4 per cent of new cancer cases; and 15 per cent of the global population.

While the burden of cancer and non-communicable diseases and the costs of inaction are great, many high-impact interventions have been found to be cost effective. The prevention and control interventions recommended by WHO and the Secretary-General of the United Nations can, with a fairly small investment, effectively alleviate the health, social and economic burdens of non-communicable diseases. The millions of premature deaths avoided would lead to reduced economic losses and increased economic output, which would surpass the investment necessary to implement such measures.

- The cost of population-based measures for reducing tobacco use, harmful alcohol use, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity recommended by WHO are estimated to cost $2 billion per year for all low and middle-income countries, a cost of less than $0.40 per person
- The implementation of individual-based "best buy" interventions recommended by WHO (including counselling and drug therapy for cardiovascular disease and cervical cancer screening) would bring the total annual cost to $11.4 billion, a per-person cost of $1 in low-income countries to $3 in upper middle-income countries.